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THE ATONEMENT AND THE MODERN PULPIT

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Interest in theology shows no signs of dying out in our time. The theology most frequently and eagerly discussed may be different from what it was a century ago; the conception of the relation between theology and the other sciences may have changed; and a number of interests have crowded in where theology was once supreme. The sermon is not now the sole or even the chief intellectual event of the week. We are for the most part much more interested in knowing a man's political or economic convictions than in discovering his views on inspiration or the Trinity. But if we may judge from the columns of reviews or the publishers' lists, theology is as much written, and presumably as much read, as ever.

This is especially true of the doctrine of the Atonement. In the last half-century no other doctrine has received more careful consideration. We have but to think of the names of Bushnell, Campbell, Dale, Simon, Lidgett, and Moberley. Those who are interested in theology as a whole, like Denney, show that they regard the Atonement as vital. It is vital for us all. If we take our theology seriously, we cannot afford to suspend our judgment here. We are bound to be partisans. Even in refusing to form a theory, we are accepting a theory. In fact, a doctrine that deals with any part of theology is bound to find itself as a doctrine of the Atonement. Every conviction about God's relation

to the world runs up into a conviction about what Christ has done for man.

Yet it will probably be the experience of most attendants at public worship that appeals to the Atonement in religious services are few and hesitating. References to the Cross, indeed, are perhaps more frequent than formerly. Christ, as living in Palestine and dying on Calvary, occupies a much larger place in our preaching than two or three generations back. The very influence of the Pauline presentation of the Gospel is strong enough to make us see the solemn shadow of the Cross of Christ stretching along every path trodden by His feet. But it would not be easy to decide as to what is gathered from most of these references by the ordinary hearer, or even as to what is meant at times by the preacher. The Cross appears to be regarded very often merely as the basis for a vague and emotional appeal for conversion or for a deeper consecration, like the pictures of the Stations of the Cross so popular in Catholic churches. On this point I find my own experience constantly confirmed by that of others. Sermons on the Atonement, like doctrinal sermons generally, are disappearing from our pulpits.

Similar reflections are suggested by the present-day use of hymns. Our hymn-books, indeed, are not lacking in hymns that deal with doctrine. Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley, the most fertile of our English hymn-writers, filled their hymns with doctrine as instinctively as they clung to the phraseology of the Scriptures; and no doctrine is expounded or alluded to more frequently than that of the Atonement. The most impressive of Newman's hymns is simply a poetical setting of the theology of the Atonement. But such hymns are rarely composed now. References to the Atonement in modern hymns are generally adapted to the older theological point of view. A sermon that

attempts to expound the Atonement from the standpoint of Lidgett or Moberley will find very little assistance in the hymn-book of any denomination.

Nor are the hymns which directly deal with the Atonement by any means the most popular. The experience of most modern organists seems to be that the hymns chiefly selected by preachers and welcomed by congregations express mystical experience, somewhat vague and poetic sentiment, or ideals of Christian service and character. Hymns on doctrine are becoming as rare in our worship as hymns which embody an appeal for instantaneous conversion or hymns which guide the thought to the other world.

This conclusion is roughly true of all the different churches; and nothing shows more clearly the distance we have travelled in the last century. With all the enthusiasm of the Evangelical Movement, the eighteenth century was as much the century of theological doctrine as was the seventeenth. The consuming passion for souls which we connect with the early evangelists inside and outside Methodism was based on very definite theological convictions; their sermons and their hymns dealt with nothing else. Without the doctrine, the appeal and the passion are alike unintelligible. It is true that a belief in the doctrine was not presupposed in the hearer; the appeal was directed primarily to his conscience. But it was worked out in accordance with a definite "scheme of salvation," which he was expected to accept; and as soon as he could recognize himself as a "sinner saved by grace," the work was regarded as done.

The difference of tone in our evangelistic appeals today is reflected in our treatises on the Atonement. There is a note of apologetic and even of apology. It seems to be taken for granted that the reader is hostile, or at any rate unconvinced; that he is a critic rather

than a student. He comes with difficulties which must be answered. Some time must be spent in clearing away his prejudices, or in persuading him that in the book before him he will find none of the mistakes of previous writers on the subject. The doctrine itself is on its trial.

Why has the change taken place? Is there something in the modern mind which naturally rejects what to the mind of earlier generations was central? In the following pages we wish to consider this question, especially as it affects the doctrine of the Atonement. Dr. Denney has made out a list of reasons for this want of sympathy.¹ He refers to the momentous development of physical science, to the idealist movement in philosophy, and to the modern devotion to historical study; and he reminds us that the modern mind will have everything based on experience, and "desires to have everything in religion ethically construed." All these factors tell against any readiness to welcome a doctrine of the Atonement; though, rightly understood, their effect, as Dr. Denney properly asserts, should be the reverse.

But there are other considerations which make the average man of today unwilling to attend to the doctrine. His impressions of the significance of physical science and the importance of the historical method will dispose him to turn from all theological presentations of truth; and whatever influence they exert on his attitude to the Atonement they will exert on his attitude also to miracles or to the idea of revelation. With regard to the Atonement, however, he has his special difficulties.

¹ Denney, J., *The Atonement and the Modern Mind* (London, 1903), Chap. I. "Sin has no place," as Sir Oliver Lodge has said, "in the vocabulary of science." In this connection we may note the words of an influential modern preacher, Dr. G. A. Johnston Ross: "Much of the religion of this generation is lacking in vivid apprehension of certain values formerly recognized in the Cross of our Lord and Saviour. In this matter there is a very deep cleavage between representative Christian experiences of this hour and those of, say, thirty years ago." He adds, "The faith which magnifies the unmerited and sin-destroying grace of God is the only religion."

He cannot understand, in the first place, that presentation of the wrath of God which seems to be inseparable from any interpretation of the Atonement which he knows.

“Nothing can be good in Him
Which evil is in me.”

And it is in no desire (as is sometimes hinted) to escape from fear of the consequences of that wrath to himself, but from a genuine conviction as to its origin in an antiquated anthropomorphism, that he turns away perplexed even from the New Testament expressions. Nor does he fare much better with vicariousness and substitution. He knows enough of moral responsibility to sympathize with Ezekiel's axiom, “The soul that sinneth, *it* shall die”; and he cannot see how another's dying in his place can or ought to make any difference to him. Equally hard does he find the doctrine of imputed righteousness. He is not in the habit of imputing righteousness, as he understands the matter, to other people, however eagerly he may desire righteousness and encourage it in them. And he prefers that any righteousness in himself should be his own, rather than received in some mysterious way from another. The whole proceeding is apt to seem to him unreal and even unethical; and if he does not actually reject the doctrine, it fails to exert any influence on his thought or conduct. Religion to him is action, struggle, penitence, achievement.¹

Now it is an unhappy fate for a doctrine when it rouses antagonism or meets with neglect of this kind. A doctrine may make too large an ethical demand for the ordinary man, like that of entire sanctification; in this case select souls will feel its attraction all the more. Or it may pass the limits of intellectual comprehension,

¹Such is, roughly, the view of Eucken; and it is not difficult, bearing in mind the foregoing, to understand the fascination of Eucken for the high-minded and the intellectual today—the men and women who, in the atmosphere of a century or even a generation ago, might have made eager and enthusiastic evangelical Christians.

like that of the Trinity; in which case it may still be respected. But when a doctrine collides with the plain man's conviction of what is right and just, it rouses the best rather than the worst elements in his nature against it; or else, by dividing his moral convictions against themselves, it leaves him in a condition of paralysis. His only refuge is to turn away from the doctrine altogether and try to forget its existence.

It will of course be urged that these difficulties can all be explained; that in the form in which they appear to the "man in the street" they result from a mistaken and now discredited presentation of the doctrine. They have been explained. No modern teacher of the doctrine has overlooked the necessity of such an explanation. Yet the two facts remain: first, that those whose duty it is to explain them seem unable to make themselves clear, or even to agree with one another as to the point of their explanations; and next, that whatever explanations are given, something seems to be left in the mind of the hearer which is untouched by them all.

The true reason of the refusal to find room for the doctrine lies deeper. The explanations fail to satisfy because the problems they set out to solve are not the real difficulties. Otherwise, how is it that after these years of reverent and eager study they have not ceased to exist? As a matter of fact, the fate of doctrines is not decided by arguments but by affinities. There are certain tides and currents in contemporary thought which have always to be reckoned with, however ingeniously the little boats of our syllogisms may be rowed or steered. The idea that the great act in which "God commends His love toward us" reveals an unintelligible wrath in the Deity, could never have escaped refutation if it were not for something which makes us impatient with the attempt to refute it and unwilling to listen to such an attempt. The truth of vicarious suffering, so deeply

implanted in all our human experience, could not have seemed for a moment to clash with the consciousness of moral responsibility in the mind of an intelligent thinker, if something had not prevented a majority of thinking people from giving any serious consideration to the subject as it appears in theology.

What is this underlying cause? Manifestly, it is one whose operation is comparatively recent. A century ago most people felt no need for explanations at all. Now few people will even pay attention to explanations. The reason is that we have experienced a change both of attitude and interest. Before, we looked back, at our sins; now, we look forward, to our needs or hopes. We are of the opinion, with Walt Whitman, that it is not a fine thing to lie awake at night and think of our sins. We can read of the heart-searchings of Bunyan's hero and admire the acute psychological analysis of his terrors; but we do not feel these terrors ourselves. It is seldom, even in mission services, that we hear of men crying for mercy. If we do, we can hardly understand it. The phenomena of a Welsh revival or a negro camp-meeting set us asking questions about the religious "crowd-consciousness." We may indeed be frightened as to the consequences of our sins; but even then we look towards the methods of the doctor rather than of the spiritual guide; we ask how we can shape the future rather than how we can annul the past. Here lies the great difference, in the sphere of religion, between the eighteenth century and the twentieth.

Nor is this altogether to the discredit of our own times. There can be no doubt that, for all its culture, the eighteenth century was much less respectable and moral than the twentieth. Its sins were distinctly grosser and more pagan. Heaven knows, there is enough of evil in our own days. The plague spots of our modern life have swollen into areas undreamt-of when New York and

London were no bigger than moderate-sized country towns. But that region in our social life in which the coarser evils cannot parade themselves is very much larger, relatively to those plague spots, than a century ago. The whole conception of the Atonement as a way of salvation from sins whose horror deserves instant death or eternal torment is therefore becoming, for many persons, increasingly difficult.

Further, religion has grown rather ashamed of its evangelical self-centredness. We shrink from being thought "other-worldly." We do not like to be convicted of being intent on saving our own souls. And we question whether any transaction in the past can be sufficient, of itself, to assure us about the future or justify us in regarding our ultimate happiness as placed beyond the reach of doubt. George Eliot and Dickens have done more to weaken the old evangelical attitude than most people are aware. But along with these influences has worked some dim sympathy with the words of Christ, that to save his soul a man must lose it. The old call for the salvation of the individual soul at all costs falls on puzzled ears.

Another wide-spread influence makes for this forward look. Our age has seen a very significant advance in humanitarianism. We are not satisfied with telling people who live in a slum that they are wicked. We want to get them out of the slum altogether, and even to destroy the slum. It is not enough for us to convict the drunkard of self-indulgence and callousness; we wish to close the saloon. We long for a clean earth around us to answer to the clean heaven above. Where our forefathers saw evil to denounce, we see suffering to sympathize with, to cure, and to prevent. This attitude is the direct result of the Evangelical Movement. The social problem was the discovery made by the men who were at the centre of that Movement. But by a

strange irony of fate, the daughter has been set against the mother. It may be true that behind each social disease lies a sin. The humanitarian thought of today finds it easier to remember that behind each social sin there lies a disease.¹

Yet this change of front cannot be attributed to any lack of moral seriousness, or any unwillingness to take into consideration the phenomenon of sin. On the contrary, we are inclined to turn from contemplating sin simply because we have taken it into consideration. For if we are to convict people of sin for the presence of social diseases, who are the persons to be convicted? the starving girl who fell into evil ways, or the well-fed youth who tempted her? the unskilled half-employed man who has tried his hand at some bungling crime, or the shareholders of the company which needs a large reserve of stagnant labor? In such a complicated society as ours it seems impossible to say with confidence, "Thou art the man." We feel safer when we put aside the thought of guilt altogether, and concentrate our attention on restoration.

Now, interest in the doctrine of the Atonement finds it very hard to make headway against such influences as these. The soil is unprepared for such seed. The difficulty is clear when we remember the large number of thoughtful and high-minded people who, though not antagonistic to religion, sit lightly to church membership, and give to the community what once the churches would have demanded and received. It is equally clear when we think of the professed adherents of the churches themselves. In the last few years social service has begun

¹The attitude of the more serious people in England to the problems raised by the war suggests a further illustration. There have been appeals for penitence and humiliation for the selfishness and materialism whose presence in this as in other countries has made such a war possible. That these sins exist, few would deny. But the appeals have been timid and somewhat half-hearted. People prefer rather to concentrate on the purpose to fight the war through and then to make another such war an impossibility.

to take a very strong hold upon the churches, and especially on their younger and more vigorous members. To many persons the Unions for Social Service in the different denominations seem the most hopeful thing about our modern church life. It is a relief to turn from long discussions on denominational orthodoxy or connexional finance to some eager attempt to make the churches forget what concerns their own prosperity and play the rôle of the Good Samaritan or answer the test of Matt. 25. But this again means to think less of doctrine and more of service; less of the Atonement as a cure for past sin than of some scheme which shall prevent misery or ignorance in the future.

In these days too there is a growing though vague desire for reunion. "We cannot yet think alike, or even perhaps as yet pray together. But let us work together and carry out in common those great gospel precepts of practical redemptive work over which, happily, no deep disagreement is possible, and we shall come closer still later on." Those who argue in this way know that they expose themselves to grave criticisms. One criticism at least they can ignore—that which springs from the belief that the church must stand well with the comfortable and rich, and that the modern preacher is not called upon to stir up strife, like an Amos or an Isaiah. The case is more serious when we are reminded that to seek reunion along this road will drain off the attention from the great matters of our doctrinal loyalties. This follows both from the wish to avoid calling further attention to our divergencies, and from the fact that enthusiasm for social service produces that forward look which leaves the Atonement neglected. Is reunion itself to be bought only at the price of doctrine?

A similar conclusion faces us when we think of the modern attitude of the churches to Foreign Missions. Foreign Missions used to be the stronghold of evangelical

fervor. And they never enjoyed more support from the churches as a whole than at the present time. But the reasons which prompt that support have changed entirely in the last two generations. Few of us believe that the unconverted heathen will be consigned at death to eternal punishment. The older view of the Atonement taught that a way of salvation has been provided in the death of Christ, if and when people will "accept" it, but that failure to accept it, voluntary or involuntary, means ruin. But in relation to Foreign Missions this view has lost its attractiveness, and no new one has been reached. At the same time, our ideas of the work needed on the foreign missionary field have been revolutionized by anthropological study and sympathy, and medical and educational skill. Social service has played proportionately a larger part in the mission field than at home. Sin and Atonement are categories of thought that are steadily dropping out of use.

The problem of the Atonement in the modern world is thus a very complicated one. It is not a matter that calls simply for correct theological statement. It appears to set itself against all the more hopeful and attractive currents of our social life and even of our religious aspiration. "Why keep us dwelling on the past, discussing how we can be reconciled to God or washed from our sins? We do not feel the stain of sin. We do not want to waste time over reconciliation. We wish to put right actual wrongs and help men to love where hitherto they have only hated." What should be our attitude to such a claim?

Some would reply, "You are underestimating the sense of sin and the need of faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God; and what is this faith but faith in Christ's atoning and sacrificial death for our sin? Until you have learnt to think rightly of the past, it is useless to reach forward to action in the future."

Such a reply will have great weight with some—with those who feel guilt as a paralyzing burden, and who can think of nothing else until they are assured that their own souls are saved and their own consciences clear. But these are not the majority. Recent investigations into the phenomena of youthful and adolescent conversion show that the larger number are influenced at the time of their change of heart by the desire to lead a useful or happy life, by social pressure, or conviction of sin, rather than by fear of death or hell as the results of sin.¹ Into a numbing or paralyzing “sense of sin,” most people cannot be argued. Even so, the reply suggested above would be necessary for a Christian if the New Testament were itself committed to the position of the backward look and if Christianity were a ministry of reconciliation and nothing more. But is this the case?

Even to question it seems audacious. Does not the Cross stand at the very centre of Gospels and Epistles alike? Has it not been central in the whole experience and preaching of Christianity? It has, and yet only as a means to an end; and this in a double sense. Christ’s death was the way to His resurrection; and in His own predictions and in the Pauline Epistles this connection is always recognized and emphasized.² And the end of that death and resurrection was that men might live.³ Life is more than an event or an experience. Christ did not die on Calvary or rise from the tomb in Joseph’s garden that we might be forgiven or feel ourselves liberated from the past. That both of these things should

¹ Starbuck (in *The Psychology of Religion*, p. 52) points out, for instance, that in one investigation fear was the main operative cause in fourteen per cent of the cases, remorse for sin in sixteen per cent, and other motives connected with some moral ideal—the influence of others, or altruistic service—in the remaining two-thirds.

² Mk. 8 31; Lk. 18 33; Rom. 4 24, 25; 8 34, etc.

³ Rom. 5 10, 6 11; Heb. 9 14; Rev. 1 5, 6, etc.

come about, indeed, was indispensable. But His purpose was that we should live the life of men and women who had been forgiven and were delivered from the prison house. It was much that the prison doors should be flung open and that we should hear the words, "Go forth; you are free." It was more that we should be able to *behave* as those who had passed from darkness to light.

This will be seen more plainly when we consider the functions and experiences of the early church. What were the differentiae of early Christianity? The thought of deliverance from the past was a common one in the period of the beginning of our era. All the results of the recent studies of the ancient Mysteries have made this clearer. In this respect, Christianity was only one of a number of rivals competing for popular favor, and in the mind of the general public perhaps the least respectable of them all. What distinguished Christianity from the rest was the result of the deliverance she promised.

The sense of deliverance was the prelude to entrance into a community; a community with a quite definite and explicit conviction as to its vocation. In the first place, this vocation was personal holiness. Theft, adultery, lasciviousness, pride, the quarrelsome disposition, and the idle or malicious tongue—all the evil things natural in a heathen society and especially among slaves and the classes contaminated by the contagion of slavery—these were to be sternly repressed and banished; and secondly, a new set of relations was to be cultivated both towards "insiders" and "outsiders." The adherents of the church saw in each other the members of one great family, whose actions and thoughts to one another were to be always "in the Lord"; and those who were "without" had to be treated with all honesty and good-will and forbearance, readiness to forgive and refusal to take advantage, as men who were themselves

intended to find their way into the warm and sacred fellowship. In other words, the church was set, not to cherish or encourage or even arouse an experience, but to make the world the scene of God's will. Its eyes were fixed on the future.

But how can we reconcile all this with the prevailing emphasis of the Pauline Epistles? We need not hesitate to admit the difficulty. St. Paul seems unable to escape the recollection of his own deliverance from "the body of this death," the corpse of his old evil self to which he had felt himself chained, or from the thought of Christ's sacrificial death. It is true that he does not often use sacrificial terms, like the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. But the thought of the sacrifice is always before him. Even if he writes to Gentiles, he is still a Jew; and the Temple is always more familiar to him than the Agora or the Forum.

The difficulty, however, is more apparent than real. The technical language of our theology owes more to St. Paul than even to the Gospels. And St. Paul knew the sense of sin, the longing for forgiveness, and the horror of a misspent past, as few men know it today. But even of those who do know it, few know it like St. Paul. To him this horror was not for actual vices or crimes, the commission of what we should call today open sins. From the beginning, his passion had been for righteousness. His earlier life had been misspent because it had been wasted; because it had not resulted in the kind of righteousness he desired. And the deliverance which at last he found turned his dream into a reality and fulfilled in him that righteousness which before he had sought in vain. If St. Paul emphasized the Cross, it was because the Cross meant to him the indispensable condition for the life of loyalty, obedience, and triumph, which he could not describe better than as the life that was risen with Christ. As the grammarian

would say, St. Paul worked with a perfect tense instead of an aorist.

When we turn back from the Epistles to the Gospels, discussion seems hardly necessary. Whether we think of the Sermon on the Mount and the parables and longer discourses in the Synoptics, or the sermons in the Fourth Gospel, we are aware of the stress laid either on action of a quite concrete kind or on a principle of mutual love which necessitates concrete action for its achievement. There are whole regions of Christ's teaching which do not suggest that anything more than this is needful. On the other hand, no one can fail to observe the explicitness of Christ's demands for the service of the weak and helpless, the widow and the little child, the poor and the sick—a service which both the church and the State are beginning to see in a new light. Nor can any one mistake the importance in all His teaching of repentance and forgiveness; but the end of both of these is a new kind of activity. Action appropriate to repentance must be performed, or where is the repentance? If a new obedience does not follow forgiveness for disobedience, forgiveness itself is useless.

Much of the most recent study of the New Testament has led us to feel that where the ethical interest appears to be weak, its place has been taken by eschatological considerations. Eschatology implies the forward look, but one of a very different kind from that of which we have spoken. The world—that is, the present organization of society—is expected to come to an end at no distant time; but there is no evidence that, except by some individuals at Thessalonica and perhaps at Corinth, the early disciples modified their conduct because of this belief, any more than those who have professed similar beliefs in modern times. The result of the eschatological expectation was neither to discredit ethics in favor of the experience of an inner change nor to establish an

interimsethik of any kind, but to inspire conduct worthy of those who were continually waiting for the consummation of a more glorious citizenship.

It would thus appear, first, that the New Testament as a whole is in distinct harmony with the modern tendency of thought noted above, in so far as both underline the necessity of a certain type of activity as essential to Christianity; and secondly, that the presentation of the specific doctrine of the Atonement, as a whole, supports this view. In spite of various well-known passages, the Atonement is recognized as doing more than annulling the past. It fits us for playing our part in the present and the future. One very serious objection, however, would seem still to remain; namely, the sacrificial coloring inseparable from the New Testament exposition of the Atonement. It is beside the mark to urge that the actual language of sacrifice, outside of the Epistle to the Hebrews, is only employed sporadically. The New Testament is the work of Jews; and to Jews such phrases as "laying down one's life," "offering oneself as a ransom," "dying for men," could hardly be more explicit.

But, it will be urged, the Jewish sacrifices make directly against the view we have been considering. The sacrifice is an *opus operatum*; it is for sin; and when once it is duly performed, the offerer need have no further concern. If then we are to think of Christ as made a sacrifice for us, must we not fall back on the older evangelical conception once more? Such a question arises from a mistake as to the real nature of sacrifice, either in the Old Testament or in the earlier religion of mankind as a whole. At the bottom of all religion is the desire to approach to God, to be in harmony or fellowship with God or with the powers that are thought of as divine. Such fellowship may be desired for either honorable or selfish purposes. Unfortunately, it cannot in prac-

tice be maintained unbroken. That which breaks it, or renders man unable without danger to approach God, is, in the language of the Old Testament, sin. But sin does not mean simply a deliberate and "high-handed" disobedience to the known will of God. It may be the violation of some apparently unmeaning prohibition or "taboo." Indeed, certain Hebrew legal texts question the possibility of atonement by sacrifice for "high-handed" wrong-doing.¹ The point is that whenever a rupture of the relations between man and God has come about, it can only be healed by some formal and sacrificial shedding of blood. This is said to "atone for" the "sin."²

The original meaning of the root translated "atone" seems to be hardly recoverable. Equally difficult is it to decide exactly what the worshippers, at various stages in the history of sacrifice, understood by the word. But in early ritual what the worshipper understands or thinks is always a minor matter. What is important is the correctness of the ritual and its consequent efficacy with the Deity. And in any case, the sacrifice is distinctly a means to an end. What was desired by the worshipper was free access to his God and the removal of the sense of uncleanness felt before the sacrifice was offered, whether the offerer was a recovered leper or a woman after childbirth or a person who had not paid his voluntary or stated dues at the Temple punctually. The prescribed sacrifice was offered, and then he was free to resume the old relationship with God and with the community in general.

It must not be forgotten that the sacrifices are not all represented in the Old Testament as having this atoning efficacy. Before the exile, one of the oldest Semitic rituals, the "peace-offering," is generally a festal meal, in which God, the worshipper, and his friends and de-

¹ Num. 15 30; Deut. 17 12.

² Lev. 4 26, etc.; see also 12 7, 14 53.

pendants, as well as the officiating priest, all have their part—a feast which itself demands a preliminary sanctification.¹ The “burnt-offering”² is a solemn function of prayer or thanksgiving, wherein the victim was offered entire to God. The distinctive post-exilic sacrifices, however, the “sin-offering” and “guilt-offering,”³ have a definitely “atoning” significance. Yet even here the thought of the sacrificial animal as a substitute for the worshipper appears to be wanting. The important fact about the worshipper is that he is unclean and cannot himself approach God with impunity. The important fact about the sacrificial animal—ox, sheep, or goat—is that it is clean, and can go where the offerer cannot go till the offering has gone first. This is definitely true of the Paschal lamb, a very familiar type of Christ in the early church. The goat “for Azazel,” in the curious ritual of the Day of Atonement, is certainly unclean. But though this ritual was constantly in the mind of at least one New Testament writer, Christ is never regarded as driven away, like the doomed goat, into the wilderness, but, like the other goat in the ritual, as offered on the altar.⁴

In discussing the references to sacrifice in the New Testament, it is not out of place to refer to one small but not insignificant group of passages in which sacrificial terms are used, not of Christ, but of His followers. The Christian himself has a sacrifice to offer. It is not, of course, a sacrifice for sin, to enable him to regain a lost fellowship with God. That has been offered once for all on his behalf by Christ. The Christian’s priestly function

¹ 1 Sam. 16 5.

² Gen. 22 13; 1 K. 8 64.

³ Lev. 4 2 ff., 5 15 ff.

⁴ Ex. 12 5; Lev. 16 9 f. Of the sacrifices here enumerated, some were offered occasionally, when the “sin” of the offerer needed “atoning.” Others were periodical and at stated times and for the people as a whole; e.g., the daily sacrifices in the Temple and the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. But these were as definitely purificatory and remedial as the others. The whole nation was regarded as having broken some of the prescriptions, either in the course of the day or in the year, and needing by one comprehensive and regular act to be brought back into communion.

is the offering of a devoted life, or even the carrying out of a single act of love, like a collection for the poorer brethren. Such passages, of course, have no direct bearing on the Christian view of Christ's death; but they show how the conception of sacrifice, instead of being confined to a single annulling act, tended to connect itself with a life of continuous activity and service in communion with God.¹

"The theme of all religion is redemption"; or, as a German scholar recently expanded these words of Kant, "Religion is the desire for communion with the Godhead along the road of release from the power of what is essentially evil." That is true. But it is only half the truth. When we recognize that the words do not contain the whole truth, we can do justice to the truth which they do contain. The theme of religion is communion with God in redemption. That is what people today are increasingly unable or unwilling to understand. But the theme of religion is also communion with God in obedience and service and the joyful struggle for an ideal. This statement, as we have seen, is in a position to find a readier acceptance today. And it is sound doctrine. It is rooted in the conception that underlay the venerable body of Jewish Temple ritual. It lies at the very heart of that prophetic teaching which so strangely neglects any specific doctrine of atonement. It is implied by the presentation of the Atonement in the New Testament.

But there is more in it than this. Let us emphasize religion as service, and we shall find ourselves able also to emphasize religion as redemption. To serve God,

¹ The one passage in the Old Testament which seems to speak quite explicitly of substitution is Is. 53. But even there it is not stated that the sufferer bore the sins of others instead of the sinners themselves. The guilt offering is properly, in the Levitical law, the compensation for the withholding of some due (v. supra) and the end of the servant's suffering is to "make many righteous"; i.e., to put them in the right with God, make them capable henceforth of living the good life.

you must serve man. "The true and undefiled practice of religion is to visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." Is this unspiritual? On the contrary, the attempt to carry it out will prepare the soil today, as nothing else can prepare it, for the preaching of religion as redemption. If I am told that I must repent and be reconciled to God, I say "No; I must act and serve." If I am told that I must act and serve, I agree; but I then discover how hard that same service really is. I find, perhaps for the first time, that something must be done of which I had previously never thought. It is when I desire to live and act in communion with God that I become conscious of the need of a sacrifice. I can recognize it, at this point, as a means and not an end, and I can therefore understand it.

Such a presentation of the doctrine will have its effect on the other difficulties that have troubled the modern mind with reference to the Atonement. Substitution and vicariousness seem to clash with the ethical sentiments of mankind only because we have been accustomed to view them from the self-regarding standpoint. Let us think of them in relation to our powers rather than our status, and their apparent injustice vanishes. To tell me that I am to be credited with a righteousness that I do not possess may naturally perplex me. To tell me that because of what some one else has done for me, I am able to do what was before impossible, is to give me another instance of a principle to which all experience bears witness. To put the matter in another way: if salvation is simply a privilege to be received and enjoyed, the Atonement may well seem a needless subtlety. Why could not God have given it to us at once, instead of telling us that we had gained the right to it, when we had done nothing of the kind? So people will still ask. But if salvation is also a responsibility,

the case is different. Unless I am to cease to be a person, God cannot make me able to do "at a clap" what was before out of my reach. A far more intimate and appealing process is necessary. The personality of some one else must invade my own, yet in such a way as to make my own personality more fully mine than it was before. Paradox as this may seem, it can be done, though it can be done only by the sacrifice that springs from another's purity and love.

A similar relief is afforded with regard to the question of the wrath of God. If God is simply interested in individuals, His anger seems as contrary to His love as to His justice. For how can He be angry with those whom He is said to love? and how, even if He does not love them while they are still unreconciled, can He be justly angry with them except in so far as they have deliberately rejected His offers of pardon? If, on the other hand, He is anxious—to put it crudely—that certain things should be done; if what He desires is the maintenance of certain relations by human beings with one another and with Him; then we can easily imagine a very real anger—we can use no other term—breaking out where those relations are sundered. But that anger, at a state of things against which His nature is bound to react, is in no way contrary to the warmest love to every individual man and woman, or to the justice which can recognize in the fullest way the varying responsibility of each; while, at the same time, such an anger must inevitably work for the formation or resumption of those relations and for the means by which this end is attained. That is to say, God's anger, rightly understood, is a direct motive for the commending of His love to us in the death of Christ.

The danger of the older Evangelicalism, as of so much popular Catholicism, was undoubtedly in the emphasis which it laid on the gloomier aspect of its faith.

To speak "as a dying man to dying men," and about the dying Man, was the ideal of the preacher. We have very naturally felt a rebound from that point of view. Our danger lies in the other direction. We are apt to forget both the immensity of the task of Christ and the horror of disobedience to the will of God. We do not "whine over our sins." We hardly think them worth a regret. The reasons for this change of mind have become clear to us, but the consequences may be disastrous. It is just the most eager and reverent minds which have felt the torture of sin most deeply. To forget this is to neglect the most striking facts of human experience, and to relinquish all hope of attaining the heights of spiritual achievement. Yet to attempt to cultivate or induce this sense is useless. It must come of itself or it had better not come at all. And it will come when we pass, in our thinking, from condition to function—when we turn our attention to what we ought to have done and have not done, rather than to what we are. Most of us are not good enough to feel this sense of sin. We shall feel it when, like St. Paul, we are consumed with a passion for righteousness and are overwhelmed to think how we have failed. But for such a passion there must be an ideal; and it is such an ideal which is forming itself with increasing clearness in the ethical and practical aspirations of the present age. The change that makes us fear that we are losing the power to repent is preparing us, in the providence of God, for repentance.

The Atonement therefore is not a doctrine which may be pressed by the theologian but forgotten by the preacher. It is needed in the pulpit as imperatively as ever. The human heart, at its best, has suffered alienation from God. There are barriers to be removed. There are stains to be cleansed away. Sin is a fact, and a fact as real and terrible among the respectable and church-going

classes as among the outcast and criminal. But let the preaching of the Atonement take its right place. Let it be content to follow the imperative of conduct—the law that men will be judged according to their works—and the ideals of the new life of communion with God and of the new heaven and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. When this is done, the modern mind, now led by its qualities to think that the Atonement is unnecessary, will be forced by its defects to find in the Atonement the one thing needful.